What is claimed is:

1. A method for operating a computer system including at least a server and a client that are connected to each other by a type of connection, comprising the steps of:

    (a)   starting the client with a boot operating system;

    (b)   automatically establishing a communications session corresponding to the type of connection between the server and the client;

    (c)   downloading at least a first portion of a base operating system from the server to the client; and

    (d)   automatically launching the base operating system in the client after step (c).

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

    (e)   processing, in the client, a request for a second portion of the base operating system that is not included in the first portion of the base operating system;

    (f)   automatically downloading the second portion of the base operating system from the server to the client; and

    (g)   using the second portion of the base operating system in the client.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the second portion of the base operating system at least partially overwrites the first portion of the base operating system.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein step (b) includes:

    (1)   sequentially attempting to establish the communications session using successive ones of a first plurality of connection methods; and

(2)   identifying the type of connection between the server and the client when the communications session is established successfully using one of the first plurality of connection methods.

5.   The method of claim 4, further comprising, before step (a), the step of storing computer code for each of the first plurality of connection methods in a memory device in the client.

6.   The method of claim 5, wherein the memory device is an electrically erasable programmable read only memory.

7.   The method of claim 5, further comprising the steps of:

(i)   downloading replacement computer code for a second plurality of connection methods, the second plurality of connection methods being at least partially different from the first plurality of connection methods; and

(ii)   overwriting the computer code with the replacement computer code.

8.   The method of claim 4, wherein the first plurality of connection methods include at least one of the group consisting of a local area network connection method, a wide area network connection method, and an Internet connection method.

9.   A method for operating a computer system including a server and a client, comprising the steps of:

(a)   downloading a first portion of an application program from the server to the client, the first portion of the application program containing a first plurality of program files, the application program further including a second portion containing a second

plurality of program files, the second plurality of program files not being included in the first

plurality of program files, the application program being designed to operate only with the

first plurality of program files stored locally and the second plurality of program files stored

locally;

(b)   launching the application program in the client, while the first portion of the

application program is stored locally in the client, but the second portion of the application

program is not stored locally in the client;

(c)   processing in the client, a request for one of the second plurality of program

files;

(d)   automatically downloading at least one of the second plurality of program

files from the server to the client; and

(e)   using the at least one of the second plurality of program files in the client.

10.   The method of claim 9, including, before step (a), the steps of:

(1)   selecting the first plurality of program files to include program files that are

expected to be used frequently; and

(2)   selecting the second plurality of program files to include program files that

are not expected to be used frequently.

11.   The method of claim 9, wherein step (d) includes downloading all of the second

plurality of program files from the server to the client.

12.   A method for operating a computer system including a server and a client,

comprising the steps of:

(a)   downloading at least a first portion of a base operating system from the server

to the client upon startup of the client, the first portion of the base operating system

5   including a plurality of operating system files that are not stored locally in the client before

6   the downloading;

7   (b)   launching the base operating system in the client after step (a);

8   (c)   downloading at least a first portion of a second operating system from the

9   server to the client; and

10   (d)   spawning the second operating system from the base operating system in the

11   client, the base and second operating systems running concurrently in the client.

1   13.   The method of claim 12, wherein steps (a) through (d) are performed automatically

2   upon startup of the client.

1   14.   The method of claim 13, wherein the server and the client are connected to each other

2   by a type of connection, further comprising, before step (a), the steps of:

3   (1)   starting the client with a boot operating system;

4   (2)   automatically establishing a communications session corresponding to the

5   type of connection between the server and the client;

1   15.   The method of claim 14, wherein the base operating system is a Linux operating

2   system, and the boot operating system is a partial version of a Linux operating system having

3   sufficient capability to establish a connection between the client and the server.

1   16.   The method of claim 12, wherein each of the first and base operating systems is

2   Linux, and the third operating system includes one of the group consisting of Linux,

3   Windows 95, Windows 98, Windows NT, Windows 2000, Unix, BeOS, and DOS.

1   17.   The method of claim 12, further comprising the steps of:

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(e)   running an application program under either the base operating system or the

second operating system, the application program controlling a telephone interface in the

client;

(f)   detecting a telephone number being entered using a device connected to or

contained in the client, the device being one of the group consisting of a telephone keypad,

a keyboard and a voice recognition system;

(g)   establishing a telephone connection to a destination by way of the client and

the server.

18.   The method of claim 17, further comprising the steps of:

(h)   determining whether the telephone number is a long-distance number; and

(i)   if the telephone number is a long-distance number, then automatically

establishing a long-distance telephone connection between the telephone and a destination

having the detected telephone number, by way of the client, the server and the Internet.

19.   The method of claim 17, further comprising the steps of:

(h)   determining whether the telephone number is a long-distance number; and

(i)   if the telephone number is not a long-distance number, then automatically

establishing a telephone connection between the telephone and a destination having the

detected telephone number, by way of the client, the server and a public switched telephone

network.

20.   The method of claim 12, further comprising launching a third operating system from

the base operating system in the client, the base second and third operating systems running

concurrently in the client.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the second and third operating systems each execute within respective windows.

22. The method of claim 12, further comprising:

(i) displaying a first window running the base operating system; and

(ii) simultaneously displaying a second window running the second operating system.

23. A method for operating a computer system including a server and at least one client, comprising the steps of:

(a) transmitting at least a first portion of a base operating system from the server to the client after startup of the client, the first portion of the base operating system capable of being launched in the client;

(b) automatically tracking a first length of time during which the client runs the base operating system; and

(c) automatically debiting a first account record in the server by a first amount based on the first length of time, the first account record being associated with an owner of the client.

24. The method of claim 23, further comprising the step of:

(d) automatically crediting a second account record by a second amount based on the first length of time, the second account record being associated with a licensor of the base operating system.

25. The method of claim 24, further comprising the step of:

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(e)   generating a report identifying total use of the base operating system by the

at least one client over a period of time.

26.   The method of claim 25, wherein the computer system includes a plurality of clients,

and step (e) includes identifying, in the report, total use of the base operating system by all

of the plurality of clients over the period of time.

27.   The method of claim 26, further comprising the step of:

(f)   periodically initiating a payment to the licensor based on the total use of the

base operating system.

28.   The method of claim 27, wherein steps (e) and (f) are performed electronically.

29.   The method of claim 23, further comprising the steps of:

(1)   downloading at least a first portion of an application program from the server

to the client, the application program capable of being launched in the client from the base

operating system;

(2)   tracking a second length of time during which the client runs the application

program; and

(3)   automatically crediting a first application account record associated with an

owner of the client by a second amount based on the second length of time.

30.   The method of claim 29, further comprising automatically crediting a second

application account record by a third amount based on the second length of time, the second

account record being associated with a licensor of the base operating system.

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31.   The method of claim 30, wherein the system has a plurality of clients, the method further comprising the steps of:

(4)   generating a report identifying total use of the application program by all of the plurality of clients over a period of time;

(5)   periodically, electronically initiating a payment to the licensor based on the total use of the application program.

32.   A method for configuring computer programs on a client that is coupled to a server, comprising the steps of:

(a)   identifying a first plurality of computer programs that are listed in a user profile associated with a user of the client, the first plurality of computer programs being associated with the user;

(b)   querying a database identifying dependencies among a second plurality of computer programs that are stored on the server, the first plurality of computer programs being a subset of the second plurality of computer programs;

(c)   identifying dependencies among the first plurality of computer programs based on the querying; and

(d)   automatically generating configuration files that are required to execute any of the first plurality of computer programs in the client, without executing any installation programs associated with any of the first plurality of computer programs.

33.   The method of claim 32, further comprising automatically downloading computer program files corresponding to the first plurality of computer programs from the server to the client.

34.   The method of claim 32, further comprising, before step (a), the step of:

storing a plurality of codes in the database, each code associated with a respective

dependency between at least two of the second plurality of computer programs.

35.   The method of claim 34, wherein step (d) includes:

generating the configuration files to reflect a dependency between the at least two

of the second plurality of computer programs, if all of the at least two of the second plurality

of computer programs are included in the first plurality of computer programs.

36.   The method of claim 35, wherein step (d) further includes:

generating the configuration files so as not to reflect the dependency between the at

least two of the second plurality of computer programs, if the at least two of the second

plurality of computer programs are not all included in the first plurality of computer

programs.

37.   A method of claim 23, further comprising the steps of:

(i)   transmitting executable computer program code and data from the server to

the client, the computer program code capable of performing calculations using the data in

the client on behalf of a third party;

(ii)   receiving data from the client representing results of the calculations

performed on behalf of the third party;

(iii)   automatically crediting a second account record in the server by a second

amount based on an amount of calculations performed, the second account record being

associated with an owner of the client.

1   38.   The method for operating a computer system including a server and at least one

2   client, comprising the steps of:

3   (a)   transmitting executable computer program code and data from the server to

4   the client, the computer program code capable of performing calculations using the data in

5   the client on behalf of a third party;

6   (b)   receiving data from the client representing results of the calculations

7   performed on behalf of the third party;

8   (iii)   automatically crediting an account record in the server by an amount based

9   on an amount of calculations performed by the client on behalf of the third party, the account

10   record being associated with an owner of the client.

11   39.   The method of claim 38, further comprising the step of automatically debiting a

12   second account record in response to receipt of the data representing results, the second

13   account record being associated with the third party.

      40.   The method of claim 38, further comprising the step of applying the amount credited

      as an offset against money owed to an owner of the server.